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# A Deuteronomic Heritage in Tobit?

*Stuart Weeks*

As has often been observed, the book of Tobit<sup>1</sup> has affinities with many different strands of early Jewish literature and thought. At various times, its protagonist is reminiscent of the patriarchs in Genesis, of the righteous but suffering Job, of the parental instructor in Proverbs, and even of Daniel, preserving his piety in exile. The book itself has been linked to works as diverse as Enoch and Ben Sira. Along with references to biblical laws and customs and echoes of biblical poetry, it also cites or alludes explicitly to biblical literature at certain points, as when Tobit recalls the words of Amos (2:6),<sup>2</sup> or when his son Tobias recalls the creation of Adam and Eve (8:6). For all the emphasis sometimes placed on its links to folklore, then, this is a work that stands very

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- 1 The textual problems posed by the book are notorious. The Qumran witnesses are too fragmentary to reconstruct a continuous text, and the principal witness to the earliest Greek version, Codex Sinaiticus, is frequently corrupt or defective in Tobit. This version may also be reconstructed to some extent, however, from ms. 319 (in part of the book) and from the very diverse Old Latin tradition. So far as possible, and except where otherwise noted, I discuss here what I take to have been the original text of the earliest Greek, which in turn was apparently very close to the Aramaic and Hebrew versions attested at Qumran. I have used the chapter/ verse divisions and nomenclature from Stuart Weeks, Simon Gathercole and Loren Stuckenbruck, *The Book of Tobit: Texts from the Principal Ancient and Medieval Traditions. With Synopsis, Concordances, and Annotated Texts in Aramaic, Hebrew, Greek, Latin, and Syriac* (Fontes et Subsidia ad Bibliam pertinentes 3; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2004). In addition to the Greek recension reflected in Sinaiticus (GII), there are two others: GI dominates the manuscript tradition, and GIII is found in a few late minuscules. Both appear to be later re-workings of GII. Although the subsequent development of the text suggests that GII and the Qumran texts may stand at some remove from the original composition, I am not persuaded that we can identify specific sections of the material, such as the prayer in ch. 13, as secondary additions: there is much stylistic variety in the book, but a general coherence of theme and thought.
  - 2 The subsequent reference to Nahum in Sinaiticus at 14:4 ("Jonah" in the GI tradition) is lacking in the Old Latin witnesses, and is probably a secondary specification. On the switch to Jonah, see Mark Bredin, "The Significance of Jonah in Vaticanus (B) Tobit 14.4 and 8," in *Studies in the Book of Tobit: a Multidisciplinary Approach* (ed. M. Bredin; Library of Second Temple Studies 55; London: T & T Clark, 2006), 43–58.

self-consciously in the traditions of Jewish writing. In its clever characterization, along with its use of simultaneity and converging plotlines, moreover, it is also quite a sophisticated composition. We might find it rather surprising, therefore, if the book did not reflect some knowledge of Deuteronomic ideas and traditions, and the righteous Tobit's conscientious piety seems rooted in such things. To speak simply of Deuteronomic influence, though, would be to underestimate the complexity of the picture which the author paints for us, and it seems astonishing that recent scholarship on Tobit has become dominated by a paradigm of the book as a quintessentially Deuteronomic work.<sup>3</sup> This presentation sometimes involves considerable over-simplification of earlier Jewish traditions: not all biblical ideas of retribution and mercy, for instance, are Deuteronomic,<sup>4</sup> any more than are concerns with the promised land or with the Jerusalem Temple – unless pan-Deuteronomism has finally swallowed, say, the patriarchal narratives or the book of Isaiah.<sup>5</sup> More

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3 Thus, even in one of the most thoughtful and important recent commentaries, Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *Tobit* (CEJL 1; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2003), we are told with little subsequent qualification that "In a special way, the Tobit story is dominated by the teaching of Deuteronomy" (36). See the recent views cited in Micah D. Kiel, "Tobit and Moses Redux," *JSP* 17 (2008): 83–98, which itself offers a much more nuanced opinion.

4 So, for example, writing about the farewell speech in ch. 14 and referencing di Lella (see below), Fitzmyer, *Tobit*, 332, claims that "Tobit's thinking sums up 'the great Deuteronomic equation', viz. that those who love God and fear him will be rewarded, whereas those who do not will suffer. See Deut 6:13; 10:12; 28:58, 63." Now, it is difficult to imagine that any writer in the Hebrew Bible, except perhaps the author of Job, did not hold this view, more or less, and it is arguably a commonplace of ancient religion more generally, so to describe it as specifically "Deuteronomic" seems a little selective. On the other hand, the passages which Fitzmyer cites from Deuteronomy do not actually express such an opinion, and the "great Deuteronomic equation" is an interpretation of the book, not something ever expressed by Deuteronomy itself. To understand the passages in this way is to extinguish the elements which do make them characteristically Deuteronomic. Deut 28:58, for instance, is a warning that God will bring afflictions on the Israelites and their descendants (it is the *nation* which is being addressed), if they do not carefully follow "all the words of this Torah, written in this book so as to fear this honourable and awesome name": the Deuteronomic emphasis is upon national obedience to the law, which will serve as, or bring about fear of God. Likewise, Deuteronomy seems almost incapable of referring to love of God without mentioning obedience to his commandments almost in the same breath, and to detach one activity from the other is, in essence, to misrepresent one of the most basic elements of Deuteronomic thought.

5 As Norbert Hofmann, "Die Rezeption des Deuteronomiums im Buche Tobit, in der Assumptio Mosis und im 4. Esrabuch," in *Das Deuteronomium* (ed. G. Braulik; ÖBS 23; Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2003), 311–42 (311–26), recognizes, key concerns about Jewish practice which seem to link Tobit to Deuteronomy are also frequently

importantly, though, it seems to involve an over-simplification of Tobit itself.

## Tobit in Exile

To begin at the beginning, there is nothing in the book of Tobit which suggests that its central story is based either on historical events or on pre-existing traditions about the central character. The author's decision to set his story in the Assyrian diaspora, therefore, is an interesting one in itself – especially since his knowledge of that setting seems rather shaky.<sup>6</sup> Whatever the reasons, though, the result is that Tobit's piety isolates him from the very outset of the story. As a citizen of the Northern Kingdom, he belongs to a tribe which has seceded from the House of David (1:4), and while all his family sacrifice "to the bull-calf which Jeroboam the king of Israel had made in Dan, on all the mountains of Galilee," he claims to have been left alone to fulfil the eternal commandment made to all Israel, by going to Jerusalem on feast-days (1:5–6). After his capture and exile, he finds himself in Nineveh, where he does much for his fellow exiles, but is again the only one to remain properly pious: "both all of my brothers and the members of my race would eat of the gentiles' food, but I kept my self safe from eating the

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to be found in much other biblical and later Jewish literature, and seem to be tied up with broader notions of Jewish identity at the time of the book's composition.

- 6 As I completed this article, a new study by Devorah Dimant became available to me, which addresses just this question: "Tobit in Galilee," in Gershon Galil, Mark Geller and Alan Millard, *Homeland and Exile: Biblical and Ancient Near Eastern Studies in Honour of Bustenay Oded* (VTSup 130; Leiden: Brill, 2009), 347–59. As she observes, "The choice of an Israelite background for Tobit is not ... self-evident. It is, in fact, unique in the ancient Jewish literature known to the modern reader." She rejects the suggestion of Richard Bauckham, "Tobit as a parable for the exiles of Northern Israel," in Bredin (ed.), *Studies*, 140–64, that the book was actually written for northern exiles in Adiabene and Media, and concludes instead that, "the Israelite background was selected as representative of sin and punishment in exile. It permitted Tobit's author to contrast with it the "Judahite" ethos embraced by Tobit, that is, the Jewish religious practice of his time" (353). It seems possible also, I think, that the international popularity of the *Sayings of Ahiqar* influenced the decision, especially since Ahiqar and his nephew appear as minor characters, related to Tobit, at 1:21–22; 2:10; 11:18; and 14:10. On the influence of Ahiqar, see especially Miriam Lichtheim, *Late Egyptian Wisdom Literature in the International Context: a Study of Demotic Instructions* (OBO 52; Freiburg, CH: Universitätsverlag, 1983). The author may offer a realistic portrayal of exile in Assyria, as Dimant suggests; his knowledge of the region where the story is set, however, seems very limited, and he famously, for instance, underestimates quite considerably the distance between Ecbatana and Rages.

gentiles' food" (1:10–11). When he subsequently prays for death and asks God not to punish him, in 3:1–6, Tobit links his own sins to the faults of his ancestors and of his people, whose punishment has become legendary: it is legitimate for God to make judgements with respect to Tobit's sins "for we did not enact your commandments, and did not walk properly before you" (3:5).<sup>7</sup>

The book offers no challenge, then, to Deuteronomistic ideas about the faults and fate of the Northern Kingdom or the legitimacy of the Jerusalem cult alone, and Tobit carefully disassociates his own behaviour from that of the community to which he belongs.<sup>8</sup> This self-portrayal, though, is undermined at points by Tobit himself: in 1:8 he observes that he was taught to tithe by his grandmother, which suggests that not everybody in his tribe had gone bad, while in 5:14, after we have ceased to hear the story solely from Tobit's point of view, he lets drop that others used to accompany him on his trips to Jerusalem. More generally, indeed, Tobit's self-perception sits uncomfortably beside the comments of others. When he is restored after losing every-

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7 I find it difficult to accept without some reservations, though, the suggestion that Tobit's reference to his own sins in 3:5 indicates a role as representative of his people, and that by "being joined to his people, he identifies himself with their sins and therefore also confesses them as his own"; cf. Beate Ego, "The Book of Tobit and the Diaspora," in *The Book of Tobit: Text, Tradition, Theology: Papers of the First International Conference on the Deuterocanonical Books, Pépa, Hungary, 20–21 May, 2004* (ed. G. G. Xeravits and J. Zsengellér; JSJSup 98; Leiden: Brill, 2005), 41–54 (45). So, similarly, Will Soll, "Misfortune and Exile in Tobit: The Juncture of a Fairy Tale Source and Deuteronomic Theology," *CBQ* 51 (1989): 209–31: "Tobit not only affirms this theology but identifies himself with wayward Israel to a striking degree (note especially the use of the 1st pers. pl. in 3:3–5), even while his personal innocence makes him conspicuously righteous" (224). There is indeed a sudden transition in Sinaiticus from the first person singular to the first person plural, and so apparently from the individual to the collective: "And now many are your judgments: they are legitimate to make with regard to me, concerning my sins, for we did not enact your commandments, and did not walk properly before you." In the first place, however, the reading is complicated by the fact that the principal Old Latin witnesses support GI against Sinaiticus: both have "my sins and those of my parents." That the (possibly independent) L3 supports Sinaiticus – as does the Vulgate – is suggestive of variation within the early Greek tradition, and the texts divide in the same way at 3:3–4, when Sinaiticus, L3 and Vulgate have Tobit confess that he has sinned himself, while other OL and GI have him refer to the actions of his parents. More importantly though, it is not difficult to take Tobit simply to be indicating his acceptance of legitimate collective punishment: As Kiel "Tobit and Moses Redux" puts it (93): "Tobit's singularity in righteousness cannot escape the collective guilt of his people, a sentiment found elsewhere in postexilic thought." As for acknowledgment of his own sins, Tobit regards himself as righteous, but nowhere suggests that he is without sin.

8 Kiel, "Tobit and Moses Redux," 91–92, suggests a deliberate allusion to Moses in the presentation of Tobit as essentially separate and alone.

thing, his insistence on finding a poor man to share his food sets off a chain of events which results in his blindness and dependence on his wife: after Tobias reports a corpse, Tobit feels obliged to retrieve it, which spoils his supper, then to bury it which leaves him unclean; because he is unclean, he feels obliged to sleep outside, and because he sleeps outside, his eyes are damaged by the bird excrement. The extent to which his sense of obligation corresponds to any actual requirement in all of this is unclear,<sup>9</sup> and Tobit's understanding of his duties, as the only pious man in his community, does not self-evidently embrace any concern for his family, with whom he has just been re-united, and provokes ridicule from his neighbours. During the period after these events, when Anna is forced to support him (not least because he has forgotten about the substantial sum which he had previously deposited in Media), Tobit subsequently accuses his wife of theft, quite unjustly. We may again have some sympathy with her when she is apparently sarcastic about his piety in response – and it seems altogether too much for Tobit then to complain about “false reproaches” (3:6), even if these do offer a narrative link to the genuinely false reproaches thrown at Sarah, a few verses later. Tobit is a pious man, to be sure, but his piety comes close to the point of being obsessive and self-destructive, while his sense of isolated righteousness neglects the price paid by others for his behaviour.<sup>10</sup>

It is difficult to know what the author intends us to make of this, or what precisely it is that motivates Tobit: there is a risk of approaching the characterization from too modern a perspective, and seeing eccentricity in those facets which are supposed to evoke admiration, although it is true that even Tobit acknowledges that his behaviour might seem strange or annoying when he first interrogates Tobias' prospec-

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9 Indeed, a case could be made for suggesting that the book here reflects a pre-occupation inherited more from Hellenistic literary culture than from Jewish practice, since it is in classical sources that we find a strong emphasis on burial of the dead, even strangers, as a requirement of ancient law, and it is a familiar motif in Greek tragedy; see János Bolyki, “Burial as an Ethical Task in the Book of Tobit, in the Bible and in the Greek Tragedies,” in *The Book of Tobit*, 89–101. A number of commentators have drawn attention to parallels with Antigone, who defies a royal command to bury her brother. Tobit's insistence on almsgiving seems more characteristic of Judaism in the Second Temple period (cf. Sir 29:8–13), but biblical demands are much more modest, and the portrayal is either exaggerated or anachronistic.

10 Anthea Portier-Young puts it more positively: “the greatest single cause of Tobit's suffering is his inability correctly to perceive and appreciate the extent of his connectedness in this human community.” See her “Alleviation of Suffering in the Book of Tobit: Comedy, Community, and Happy Endings,” *CBQ* 63 (2001): 35–54 (41).

tive guide about his family in chapter 5. It is important to recognize, however, that the relationship between Tobit and those around him, even when a little strained, is shaped by a particular set of attitudes to community. Even from the days before his exile, Tobit's focus is upon his own individual fulfilment of obligations to his community, whether in terms of tithing at Jerusalem, of charitable work, or of burial of the dead. The advice which he offers to Tobias, in chapter 4, similarly concentrates more upon charity than upon anything else (and this, along with his tithing, was perceived to be the essential message of the book by some later writers),<sup>11</sup> although it also emphasizes the need to marry within the tribe (4:12–13). Tobit is very concerned with community, then, but his concern is with the obligations of each individual towards that community – whether construed as the greater Israel which was granted Jerusalem, the flawed group of Northern exiles, or his own particular tribe – rather than with the activities of the community as a whole. The Northern Kingdom has collapsed and the Southern Kingdom will do so (13:9; 14:4), but the obligations of individuals persist, as does their membership of their community.

## Nation and Election

In this respect, the book is underpinned by notions of individual and nation which are rather un-Deuteronomic. It has no interest in a covenant between God and the nation, or in the powers and forces which might lead the nation as a whole astray; its notions of election and distinction, moreover, are rooted in such ideas as the descent of the people from “prophets” – notably Noah, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob – whose

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11 Two medieval Jewish versions of Tobit, which are clearly related to one another, each introduce the story with a brief discussion of the importance of tithing, and conclude it with a further commendation of alms and tithes, declaring, “So we learn how great is the power of alms and tithes, and how, because Tobi gave alms and separated out his tithes as is appropriate, the Holy One, blessed be he, rewarded him.” One of these (Codex Or. Gaster 28), has a heading “For the Second Day of Shabu’ot,” which suits both the mention of Pentecost in Tobit 2.1, and the general theme of tithing. Even more than the other text (Bodleian Hebrew Ms. 2339), it abbreviates the end of the story, and consequently downplays the miraculous elements. This presentation of Tobit as an exhortation to giving within the community (and supporting Torah scholars in particular, according to the introduction in the Gaster ms.) indicates one of the key reasons, perhaps, for the continued circulation of the story amongst Jews. Neither text, incidentally, shows any particular interest in Tobit's burial of the dead. See Weeks *et al.*, *The Book of Tobit*, 39–41, 44–46.

seed will inherit the earth (4:12).<sup>12</sup> Individuals are supposed to behave according to this special status, and the scattering of Jews amongst the nations offers an opportunity for them to demonstrate God's greatness to others individually (13:3–4), not through their behaviour as a nation in the land (cf. Deut 4:6–8) – at least until the proper re-building of the Temple (14:5–7). God punishes and shows mercy (13:2, 5; 14:5), but there is no hint that his relationship with Israel has been terminated, a covenant torn up, or a new situation come into being with the fall of the North and prospective fall of the South. The ideas of the book appear to rest on a pre-Mosaic election of Israel, which is ultimately interminable. Individuals are affected by broader divine acts against the nation as a whole; they are each judged by God, however, not as members of the nation, but with respect to their own behaviour, especially towards their community. Despite its affirmations of divine punishment and reward at a national level, then, Tobit seems more dependent on concepts of election and exceptionalism than on the conditional, covenantal ideas of Deuteronomy, and the book places more weight on individual support of the community than on the fidelity of the community itself.<sup>13</sup>

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- 12 Sinaiticus is lacking here, but the general point is affirmed by G1. The Old Latin witnesses separate (and in one case omit) Noah, and the presentation of him both as a prophet and as a specifically Jewish ancestor in this context is curious. Noah's marriage to his first cousin is noted in Jubilees 4:33, although not in Genesis, which indicates that Tobit may be drawing on established but non-biblical traditions here.
- 13 Alexander A. Di Lella, "The Deuteronomic Background of the Farewell Discourse in Tob 14:3–11," *CBQ* 41 (1979), 380–89, argues that Tobit's dying speech in 14:3–11 deliberately echoes not just the language but the thought of Deuteronomy when it looks forward to divine punishment and mercy toward Judah. There are certainly Deuteronomic expressions in use here, but the passage notably does not refer to apostasy and infidelity as the causes of exile – Di Lella reads them in on the basis of the reference to Deuteronomy (see especially 381–82). More generally, there seem to be some questionable assumptions involved in his contention that the undoubted borrowing of Deuteronomic phraseology in the speech and book must reflect a corresponding dependence on Deuteronomic ideas, especially when the concepts are, at times, clearly very different. As for his more general assertion that Tobit shares the aim of the final redactors of Deuteronomy, to offer encouragement to the depressed people, it should be borne in mind both that this is a speculative interpretation of Deuteronomy, and that, more importantly, Tobit is set in an exile, but is not itself an exilic composition. Specific comparisons with Deuteronomy at certain points are by no means improper, and Steven Weitzman, "Allusion, Artifice, and Exile in the Hymn of Tobit," *JBL* 115 (1996): 49–61, plausibly sees, for instance, deliberate allusions in Tobit 13 to the Song of Moses in Deut 32. He sensibly and significantly does not, however, draw from these the conclusion that the book must be dependent on Deuteronomic thought *in toto*; he rather associates them with a broader attempt in



When it does talk about the nation and national history, Tobit tends to do so in terms of Jerusalem and the Jerusalem Temple. This interest is announced, of course, in Tobit's description of his youthful trips to the city, but it culminates in the idealized portrayal of Jerusalem's rebuilding in 13:9–18, reminiscent of such prophetic texts as Isa 54, or of the later apocalyptic visions in 4 Ezra and Revelation 21:10–21. The text is difficult in places here, and 13:9 is lacking in Sinaiticus, but the Old Latin reading suggests that the city itself was blamed for its forthcoming downfall in the earlier Greek tradition of GII: "Jerusalem, holy city, he will punish you for the deeds of your hands." Although this is altered to "the deeds of your sons" in the GI tradition, the address as a whole is to the city in verses 9–14, and the city seems to serve as a symbol or metonym for all Israel (cf. 13:18). It also has a role in the world, and curses are threatened in 13:12 not only for those who damage it, but also for "all those who reject you, and all who blaspheme you; cursed are all who hate you and all who speak a harsh word";<sup>14</sup> there are corresponding blessings in 13:14. Tobit's prayer, in other words, implicates the city itself in its downfall, but then promises that it will serve as a touchstone for divine judgment of the peoples. This special emphasis is a particular feature of the prayer in chapter 13, but it does accord with the earlier statement (1:4), that the "temple of God's dwelling" had been built in Jerusalem to serve "for all generations of time," and with the further promises of 14:5–7, which again place the rebuilding of the Temple at the heart of a new era. In 14:5, the return from exile and rebuilding of the city and temple are explicitly linked to prophetic promises, and Tobit's understanding of Jerusalem's significance does indeed seem more strongly influenced by eschatological prophecy than by Deuteronomic ideas.<sup>15</sup>

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Tobit to relate the narrative to early events in Israel's history, as a way of contextualizing the experience of exile.

- 14 Sinaiticus is again faulty here. There are variations amongst the Old Latin witnesses, but the original was probably something like that of L1: *maledicti omnes qui spernunt te et omnes qui blasphemant te, maledicti erunt omnes qui odiunt te et omnes qui dixerint verbum durum*. 4Q196 is very fragmentary, and DJD reconstructs the verbs largely on the basis of the Old Latin, but the first, בִּיזָן, if correctly read, seems clearly equivalent to Old Latin *spernunt*. Moreover, although GI shortens the list to give a simple contrast, its "all who hate you" echoes the lists in the Old Latin and 4Q196, rather than Sinaiticus. It seems highly probable that the beginning of the list has simply been lost in the latter.
- 15 It is possible that the concern also reflects a desire on the part of the author to emphasize the continuing significance of Jerusalem for Jews in the diaspora, and Hofmann, "Rezeption," 325, raises the possibility that financial support for the Temple is at issue.

We should be wary of attempting to formulate a clear doctrine from the various references, and Tobit has no obvious concern to promote one, but it does seem that the book understands the past and future of Israel in terms which are only partly to be traced to Deuteronomic concepts. Israel, to be sure, is understood as one nation which enjoys a special relationship with God; the northern tribes have been punished for false worship, and many members of those tribes are still neglectful of their duties, while Judah is going to be punished for sins committed in or by Jerusalem. There is no suggestion that either punishment is misplaced, excessive or vicarious, and there is no idealization of Israel itself. To that extent, Tobit interprets history in much the same way as does the Deuteronomistic History, and there is little that resembles either, say, the predetermination of history in apocalyptic texts or the re-evaluation of Israel's punishment in Second Isaiah. The book not only dispenses with explicit ideas of covenant, though, as we have already seen, but also picks up ideas about the future role of Israel and Jerusalem which suggest an indissoluble character to the relationship between God and Israel. There is no reference in all this to the "new covenant" concepts of Jeremiah and Ezekiel, or to any other revisions of the relationship which might forge a link to the Deuteronomic covenant. The Temple, furthermore, takes on a role which is not incompatible with its place in Deuteronomy, but which is clearly much more significant.

### Personal Piety and the Law

Of course, the references to history and nation are largely confined to particular passages in the book, and its more general emphasis on individual behaviour might lead us to expect that this would be an area in which the affinities of Tobit might be clearer. As we have already seen, indeed, there is a particular focus upon certain aspects of piety, and it is not difficult to establish the concerns of the work in this area. It proves more difficult, however, to define the basis of those concerns. The apparent duty of Raguel to give Sarah to Tobias, for example, can probably be traced to a concern in Num 36:1–13, that if a daughter inherits, then she must marry within her tribe, so that the inheritance is retained by the tribe.<sup>16</sup> As Raguel's only child, Sarah is his heir, and the point is

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16 See, e.g., John J. Collins, "The Judaism of the Book of Tobit," in *The Book of Tobit*, 23–40 (31), and Thomas Hieke, "Endogamy in the Book of Tobit, Genesis, and Ezra-Nehemiah," in the same volume, 103–20 (106).

emphasized in 6:12. In the book of Ruth, furthermore, there is an expectation that the closest relative of a widowed woman's husband should have the right to marry her, just as the levirate law of Deut 25:5–10 imposes a duty on brothers of dead husbands, and there is some perception in the rabbinic literature that Jews were once required to marry another member of their tribe.<sup>17</sup> If this is more a matter of convention than strict law, it is at least a convention rooted in biblical statements and precedents. In Tobit 6:13, however, it is claimed without qualification by Raphael that, "according to the judgment of the book of Moses," Raguel will render himself liable to death if he does not comply. If this is a reference to the death penalty, as opposed to extreme divine displeasure, it has no evident basis in the Torah.<sup>18</sup> The text, moreover, threatens this penalty not only if Raguel gives Sarah to another man, now that he knows about Tobias' claim, but also if he chooses simply to withhold her from Tobias. Further explicit references are made to the Torah and the "book of Moses" in 7:11–13, in connection with the marriage: it is not clear whether these are reminders of the constraint under which the reluctant Raguel feels himself to have been placed, or assertions that the marriage itself is in accordance with Mosaic law. If the latter, it is again difficult to identify any particular law,<sup>19</sup> but the ambiguity itself points to an important characteristic of this material: it is driven more by the requirements of characterization and plot development than by any specific concern to promote legal principles.

Raphael, masquerading as a human, needs to persuade the parties concerned that there should be a marriage between Sarah and Tobias. He correspondingly emphasizes or even exaggerates to Tobias the obligation of Raguel, and in 6:16, when he reminds Tobias of his father's words (about which, incidentally, he is not supposed to know), he turns an exhortation to marry within the tribe (4:12) into a much more restrictive demand that Tobias take a wife from his "father's house-

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17 See Hieke, "Endogamy," 106 n. 10.

18 There is no evidence, furthermore, that it was a later Jewish interpretation of the law, as Fitzmyer suggests; see Fitzmyer, *Tobit*, 214. Collins, "Judaism," 34, does note, however that Philo "cites numerous cases where the Law requires the death penalty, including some that are not so specified in the Torah," and speaks of "a widespread tendency in Second Temple Judaism to construe 'the law of Moses' as something more inclusive than the written text of the Torah, and roughly equivalent to 'normative Jewish tradition' as a given author understood it." Whether or not the original readers would have recognized Raphael's assertion, it would clearly have possessed a certain plausibility if understandings of the law were indeed so elastic.

19 See Collins, "Judaism," 32.

hold" (6:16).<sup>20</sup> In a sense, perhaps, Raphael is exploiting Tobias' relative ignorance of the law to put him under pressure, and so we cannot reliably use his statements on the subject to assess the author's understanding of the law in this area. Raguel's own statements suggest no more than that he acknowledges Tobias' right to Sarah as his next of kin (7:10), and he goes on to warn Tobias off: there is no sign that he believes himself liable to death if the marriage does not take place, although he is not optimistic about Tobias' chances of survival (8:9–10, 16).

If Tobias might seem a little naïve in such matters, it is possibly because the written Torah plays no explicit part in what little we are told about his upbringing, or indeed elsewhere in the story. Tobit is exceptionally pious, but he is not depicted as a student of the law.<sup>21</sup> In 1:6–8, his tithing is based on an "eternal commandment," which is "commanded in the law of Moses" – but this is apparently mediated through, or supplemented by, the instructions given by Deborah.<sup>22</sup> In what he believes to be his final speech to his son, he urges him not to transgress God's commandments (4:5), but the speech is hardly a summary of the Torah, and even when elements of his instruction accord with legal requirements, this is not explicitly noted. Strikingly, when Tobit commends marriage within the tribe (4:12–13), he does so with reference to the ancestral marriages in Genesis, and there is no mention of the legal requirements which Raphael is so keen to emphasize. Tobit is aware of the Torah and keen to please God, but we are not told directly that his piety derives from any detailed knowledge of the law or involves any specific promotion of that law: we are not shown him teaching the divine commandments to his son, or talking of them when he sits, walks, sleeps, or rises – let alone writing them upon his doorposts (cf. Deut 11:18–20). In short, the Torah is not characterized as central to Tobit's piety in the way that we might expect were the story's ideas about piety rooted directly in Deuteronomic understandings. We

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20 There are no good grounds to suppose that this demand is already made by Tobit, *contra* Hieke, "Endogamy," 105–6.

21 Still less is there any suggestion in the book that the Torah should be an object of veneration or meditation; cf. Johann Gamberoni, "Das 'Gesetz des Mose' im Buch Tobias," in *Studien zum Pentateuch: Walter Kornfeld zum 60. Geburtstag* (ed. G. Braulik; Wien: Herder, 1977), 227–42 (240). Gamberoni offers a detailed discussion of Tobit's references to, and ideas about law.

22 The commandment to tithe only at Jerusalem is found in Deut 12:11, and some specifics of Tobit's practice are probably drawn from Deut 14:22–28; cf. especially Fitzmyer, *Tobit*, 109–10. It is difficult to understand all that he does, though, simply in terms of biblical legislation, and there may be some reliance on later, Second Temple customs.

might further observe, indeed, that even Raphael seems reluctant to talk about the Torah once he has used it to secure Tobias' marriage: his speech in 12:6–15 offers quite a lot of advice and commendations – but makes no reference at all to the Torah.

## The Role of God

Again, we should be wary of assuming that this reflects some underlying, alternative ideology. Tobit is not a child of the Josianic reforms, but a Northerner who has spent much of his life abroad in royal service, and who has maintained an obstinate piety against all reasonable expectation, even when that piety has led to his flight and then his blindness. If we wish to maintain that the author is promoting some distinctively Deuteronomic agenda, or even that Deuteronomy furnishes the inspiration for his portrayal of proper Jewish piety, then it is surely significant that he pays so little attention to the Deuteronomic emphasis on Torah as the basis for such piety. On the other hand, if we allow that this author takes seriously the choices which he has made about character and setting, and that the actions which flow from Tobit's piety are crucial to the development of the plot, we do not need to attribute them to some other particular set of values or beliefs. The book tells a story which ultimately promotes piety, but it is not a book specifically *about* piety. Indeed, the story also pays great attention to the power of God – but the demands of its plot raise some significant theological problems, which are noted, perhaps, but hardly addressed, and which should similarly remind us that this is not a book *about* God.

When Raphael reveals his true nature, and recounts the underlying plan behind the events which have occurred, he makes it clear that Tobit had impressed God by his charitable works (12:8–9). His explanation then becomes very confusing, however. According to Sinaiticus, he tells Tobit: “And now, when you prayed, and Sarah, I presented the memorial of (both) your prayer(s) before the glory of (the) Lord, and when you used to bury the dead, likewise. And when you did not hesitate to get up and leave your meal, and went and laid out the corpse, then I was sent to you to test you, and at the same time God sent me to heal also Sarah, your daughter-in-law” (12:12–14). Tobit's burial of the dead, though, preceded his prayer, and if the reference to “testing” is supposed to imply that Tobit's blindness was a test, it is hard to see how it coincides with the attempt to solve Sarah's problem, and why it is presented as subsequent to the prayer; the earlier summary in 3:15–16, incidentally, mentions no such test, and it is difficult to square the

two accounts. Nevertheless, since it enjoys support in the Old Latin tradition, this account may well be very early, if not original, and the subsequent versions of Tobit have made some effort to resolve the difficulties – GI, for instance, makes Raphael a hidden observer of the earlier events. The problems, however, go deeper than the text, and the “testing” of Tobit may be no more than an effort to gloss over them.

Earlier in the book, God recognized Tobit’s faithfulness by making the Assyrian king look favourably upon him, and so the book evidently accepts the idea of divine consciousness of, and intervention in individual human lives. When things begin to go wrong, however, such divine support is conspicuously absent.<sup>23</sup> Tobit loses everything, including, ultimately, his sight and his self-respect. Sarah, in the meantime, has apparently done nothing to bring upon herself the unwanted attentions of the demon Asmodeus. It is only when each prays for death that God seems stirred into action: their common prayer is heard “in the presence of the glory of God” (3:16) – although that subsequently turns out to mean that Raphael drew the “memorial” of it to God’s attention (12:12). God then neither grants the prayers nor addresses the underlying problems directly. When the issues are subsequently resolved, through the judicious application of fish innards, Tobit and Sarah are both very pleased with the outcome, but no real explanation is offered for their previous difficulties. Even if we may detect an echo of Job’s situation, moreover, there is no direct attempt in Tobit to grapple with the problems of innocent suffering, and, beyond the difficult reference to “testing,” there is no acknowledgement of divine involvement in or awareness of that suffering.<sup>24</sup> It is surely not

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23 This is not itself indicative of Deuteronomic influence. Portier-Young, “Alleviation,” 37, rightly indicates the limits of Deuteronomic analysis: “Deuteronomic theology of divine justice offers a potentially fruitful model for interpreting national calamities and communal suffering. Yet in no way does this model purport to explain the unique suffering of individuals. Though it seems tempting to proceed by analogy from nation to person, and claim that God always rewards the good person and punishes the bad person (Job’s friends make such a claim), such logic is not inherent in the Deuteronomic model.” She goes on to say, more problematically, that, “... though the Deuteronomist perceives God as active in history, that author does not hold God directly responsible for the immediate fortunes of all individuals.” That may be the case, but there is a danger of reading a positive doctrine into the book’s silence on such matters. There is not a “Deuteronomic” approach to divine involvement in the lives of individuals, but that does not mean that the Deuteronomists actively rejected such an idea.

24 At best we might say, with Portier-Young in her more recent article, that “Tobit focuses less on the reasons for suffering, though it does affirm the idea of testing (12:14) and chastisement (13:14), than on responses to it”; see “‘Eyes to the Blind’: A Dialogue Between Tobit and Job,” in *Intertextual Studies in Ben Sira and Tobit: Essays*

the intention of the book to depict God as distant or detached, but a consideration of the book in theological terms does little to explain the constant exhortations to thank and praise him. We are expected to applaud the way in which divine action brings about a tidy resolution of the two situations, and a happy ending for all concerned. We are probably not expected, though, to give too much thought to the role of God in permitting those situations to develop (especially when there are apparently so few pious Jews left for him to keep an eye on), and it would be positively inconvenient if we were to dwell on the possibility that the same resolution might have been accomplished without resort to angelic disguises or medicinal fish.<sup>25</sup> Again, the point is that Tobit is shaped not principally by theological concerns or presuppositions, but by the requirements of its narrative.

For that reason, it would probably be unfruitful to enquire too deeply into the characteristics and behaviour of God in the story. To be sure, we may recognize that we are dealing with a deity whose power is not limited to the land of Israel, although he enjoys a special relationship with Israel, and who works surrounded by angels – in these and other respects, the portrayal of God in Tobit is not incompatible with that in Deuteronomy, but it is very different in tone and emphasis. The focus on the individual, which we observed earlier, is matched by a portrayal of God as responsive primarily to prayer, praise and piety, although he acts to reward and punish both individuals and nations. Again, there is nothing here which runs up against the ideas of Deuteronomic and Deuteronomistic literature, but the flavour is different. Where Deuteronomic ideas about nation and history furnish a backdrop for the situation of the exiles and for their recognition of certain duties, the book draws also on other biblical ideas of ancestry and prophecy, and on non-biblical ideas about angels and demons. All these ideas, though, are subsumed within a plot that has echoes of biblical narratives and that exhorts its readers to piety, but that seems, in the end, unconcerned with the systematic presentation of any specific

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*in Honor of Alexander A. Di Lella, O.F.M.* (ed. J. Corley and V. Skemp; CBQMS 38; Washington: The Catholic Biblical Association of America, 2005), 14–27 (16 n. 9).

25 Portier-Young, “Alleviation,” 47, writes of 3:16 that, “In one short verse the narrative shifts dramatically and quickly, for God now enters the story” – which seemingly gives the lie to her earlier claim (p. 36) that, “in the book of Tobit we meet a God who is intimately present within the human community and consummately active in the lives of those who suffer.” God intervenes only after eight years of blindness for Tobit (according to GI) and seven husbands for Sarah, and it is a compliment to the narrator’s sleight of hand, perhaps, that so many commentators speak in such terms about the book as an account of divine proximity.

religious ideology. If there is a Deuteronomic heritage in Tobit, visible at least in the book's presentation of the past, it jostles for space amongst many other concerns.

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